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PRECOLUMBIAN ELEPHANT MEDALS FOUND IN MINNESOTA

By N. H. WINCHELL

In one of the archeological volumes of the late J.V. Brower he has published an account of the discovery of a remarkable bronze medal bearing date 1446. It was found by Mr Howard W. Crosby in an old Indian trail in "Pine cooley," near Hastings, Minnesota. Mr Brower introduced a plate showing both sides of the medal,¹ and his remarks lead to the belief that it was of Indian origin and is to be classed with other discoveries that have been reported showing that the Indians had knowledge of the elephant. It is well known to archeologists that pipes of catlinite shaped like the elephant have been discovered in Iowa, also that a so-called "elephant mound" in Wisconsin has been much debated, since it is situated in the region of the effigy mounds of the Northwest. Later some fragments of elephants' (or mastodons') tusks have been exhumed from a mound in Wisconsin by a representative (Norris) of the Bureau of American Ethnology.

Since the publication of Mr Brower's volume two other bronze medals of identical size and figure have been discovered—one at Grand Forks, North Dakota, the other, as reported, at St Cloud, Minnesota.

The coexistence of man and the mastodon, or mammoth, in America, as in Europe, has advanced now beyond the stage of presumption, and has been so well verified that it can hardly be excluded from the realm of science.² Still it is necessary to exercise care in the use of facts brought to light that seem to bear on this question.

I have seen Mr Crosby's and Mr Kennedy's medals, and can

¹ *Minnesota*, pl. ix.

² Prof. W. B. Scott, in *Scribner's Magazine* for April, 1887, has exhaustively reviewed the evidence of the late existence of the elephant in America, and has concluded that not many centuries ago the elephant was an important element in American life.



MEDAL FOUND BY MR H. W. CROSBY NEAR HASTINGS, MINNESOTA

vouch for their genuineness. They were certainly beyond the skill of the Minnesota aborigines, both in the metallic alloy of which they are composed and in the mechanical execution of the embossing, to say nothing of the Roman characters and the correct Latin in which they are inscribed. They can have therefore no relation to aboriginal elephant pipes or to elephant mounds, and hence, though they were molded prior to the discovery by Columbus, they cannot be accepted as evidence that the Indians were familiar with the great pachyderm.

In searching for some explanation of the origin of these medals, and of their occurrence in America amongst the Indians, I have been aided by Judge George B. Young, of St Paul, and by Prof. Igino Sapino, director of the National Museum, Bargello, Florence, Italy. I have been permitted to use here a copy of a letter written by Judge Young to Mr H. P. Upham of the Minnesota Historical Society, published in the *Hastings Gazette* of December 17, 1904, which shows the Italian origin of these medals.

ST PAUL, Nov. 15, 1904.

DEAR UPHAM :

The medal which you showed me this morning, and which was recently dug up at Grand Forks, was undoubtedly issued in honor of the Lady Isotta of Rimini. Such is the plain meaning of the inscription on the obverse of the medal, namely, "D· Isottæ Ariminensi," the letter *D·* doubtless standing for *Dominæ*. The date on the reverse, 1446, in Roman numerals, is no doubt the date on which the medal was struck.

Sigismondo Malatesta, Lord of Rimini, although already married, fell madly in love with the Lady Isotta, who was celebrated for her beauty, intellect and culture, and continued until the end of his life the object of his adoration. She became his mistress and bore him several children in the lifetime of his first and of his second wife ; and when he became a second time a widower she became his wife.

In the year 1446 Sigismondo Malatesta began the construction of the remarkable church of San Francesco at Rimini. In one of the chapels of that remarkable church there still remains the splendid and fantastic tomb erected to Isotta in her lifetime. The urn of her sarcophagus is supported by two elephants, and bears the inscription, "*D· Isottæ Ariminense, B· M· sacrum MCCCCL.*"

The *D·* has been interpreted by some as *Divæ*, goddess, or divine, and *B· M·* as *Beate Memoriae* (of Blessed Memory) ; others, unwilling to credit such impiety, hold that *B· M·* is *Bonæ Memoriae* (of Good Memory). How-

ever this may be, the *D*· may well be interpreted as standing for *Dominæ*, both on the urn and on the medal. It will be noticed that the elephant is common to the tomb and to the medal.

Sigismondo Malatesta died in 1468 ; Isotta in 1470.

Signed (JUDGE GEO. B. YOUNG).

To H. P. UPHAM, ESQ.

The accompanying plate xxvi illustrates the medal of Mr Crosby. Plate xxvii shows the sarcophagus of Isotta, mentioned by Judge Young, from a photograph procured in Italy by Mr E. A. Whiford and furnished by Mr Crosby. The church dates from the thirteenth century, but its present condition is due to a reconstruction by Malatesta in the fifteenth century in honor of Isotta.

A letter from Professor Sapino, as translated by M. Giuliani of St Paul, is as follows :

FLORENCE, ITALY, *Jan. 10, 1907.*

DEAR SIR :

That medal which you wrote to me about is the one made by Mattei di Pasti (born 142-, died 1490?). He was an architect and painter. His name was Pandolfo Malatesta Signore di Rimini. He was working as an architect with Leon Battista Alberti at this time on the construction of the St Francis temple at Rimini, and made these medals for Signore Pandolfo Malatesta and for Lady Isotta Atti, and the medal was presented to her in 1446 ; but I am unable to tell when the medal was brought to America. If it is important to know if the medal is of any value and to trace its history you can see any of the following :

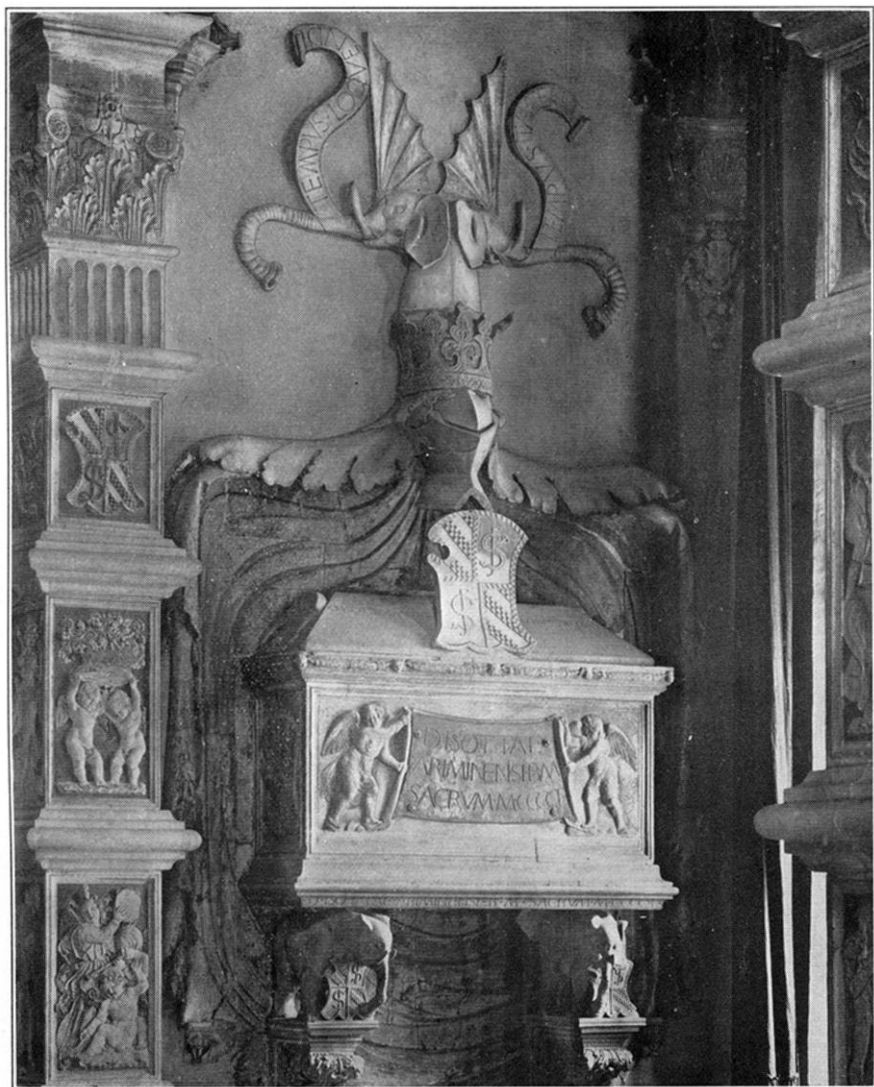
Armand : *I' medaglioni della Rinascenza*, Paris, 1883-1887.

Sapino : *Catalogo delle medaglie nel Tempio nazionale di Firenze.*

Talregg : *Italian Medals.*

IGINO SAPINO,
Director Nat. Museum,
Bargello, Florence, Italy.

I have not been able to consult any of the works referred to by Professor Sapino, but the pleasant little volume of Mrs E. Augusta King, entitled *Italian Highways* (1895), gives an account of a visit to Rimini, in which she describes this temple, or church, of the Malatestas, and dwells on the numerous signs of dedication to Isotta. He "elevated her to the rank of a divinity, and placed all over the church, as if it were some Christian monogram, the initials of her name and his own — I. S. . . and introduced into the sculptured ornament of the cathedral, inside and outside, his badge of an ele-



SARCOPHAGUS OF ISOTTA

A view from the interior of the church rebuilt by Sigismondo Malatesta at Rimini, Italy, in the Fifteenth Century

phant and hers of a rose, together with his coat of arms, and his portrait, and their monogram."¹

The foregoing is sufficient to prove the medals to be of Italian origin, and it remains only to call attention to their possible source. It is well known that one of the most efficient and trusted of the companions of La Salle was the Italian Chevalier Henry de Tonty, who was with him at Fort Crevecœur on the Illinois river, whence Hennepin and Michel Accault departed for the purpose of exploring, under La Salle's direction, the upper waters of the Mississippi. This was in March, 1680. In La Salle's letter describing this expedition he states that Accault was furnished with "about a thousand pounds of goods, such as are most valued in those regions." This party was captured and robbed by a band of Sioux Indians in the vicinity of Lake Pepin, and were conducted to Mille Lacs, in Mille Lacs county, Minnesota. The articles usually taken on such expeditions were such as would propitiate the natives — hatchets, knives, tobacco, gaudy cloths and beads, and such articles of personal adornment as rings, bracelets, and medals. There is no mention of medals in the outfit of Accault. It seems probable, however, that he had a number of the Isotta medals, and that they were supplied by Tonty, who was probably not alone a companion of La Salle, but, judging from his independent action and authority, was also in some measure a partner interested in the expected emoluments of La Salle's discoveries.

From Mille Lacs the medals could easily have been scattered anywhere in the northwestern region within the area occupied by the Sioux at that time. None has been found, as yet, within the area dominated then by the Ojibwa.

ST PAUL, MINNESOTA,

April 3, 1907.

¹ See also a late publication: "*Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta, Lord of Rimini. A Study of a XV Century Italian Despot.*" By Edward Hutton. New York. E. P. Dutton and Co. 1906.